

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5744

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government Operations & Accountability

Title: An act relating to mail ballot elections.

Brief Description: Authorizing county-wide mail ballot elections.

Sponsors: Senators Haugen, Berkey, Fairley, Sheldon, McAuliffe, Schmidt, Mulliken and Doumit; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government Operations & Accountability: 3/11/05, 3/30/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Allows counties to conduct all elections by mail ballot prior to January 1, 2012.
- Requires all elections to be conducted by mail ballot effective January 1, 2012.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Green, Vice Chair; Nixon, Ranking Minority Member; Clements, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Miloscia and Sump.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Schindler.

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191).

Background:

A county auditor may designate a precinct as a mail ballot precinct if it has fewer than 200 active registered voters, excluding ongoing absentee voters. If the auditor designates a precinct as a mail ballot precinct, he or she must notify all registered voters in the precinct by mail that all future elections will be conducted by mail. If the number of active registered voters in the precinct increases to over 200, or the auditor decides to return to a polling place election environment, the auditor must notify voters by mail and provide the address of the polling place.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Prior to January 1, 2012, a county auditor may conduct all elections by mail ballot if he or she is given authorization to do so from the county legislative authority. The county legislative authority must give its authorization to conduct all elections by mail ballot to the auditor at least 90 days in advance of the first election to be conducted by mail. If the county legislative authority and the county auditor decide to return to a polling place environment, the county legislative authority must give its authorization to do so to the auditor at least 180 days in advance of the first election to be conducted in a polling place environment. The auditor must then notify all registered voters in the county and provide them with the polling place to be used.

Effective January 1, 2012, all elections in the state must be conducted by mail. A county legislative authority may petition the Secretary of State to extend this deadline. The Secretary of State may extend the deadline for any period of time up to January 1, 2014.

Prior to converting to a mail ballot election, the auditor must notify all registered voters in the county that all elections will be conducted by mail. Individuals with disabilities must be given voting access in all vote-by-mail elections.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The amended bill requires all elections to be conducted by mail beginning January 1, 2012, and allows counties to apply for an extension of up to two years. The amended bill requires that individuals with disabilities be given voting access in all vote-by-mail elections.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.**Testimony For:** (In support of original bill) More and more counties have started voting by mail. Most people in the state already vote by mail, which decreases the usefulness of polling places. The issue of whether to vote by mail should be a local decision that could be put on the ballot as an advisory question. Having the option to vote by mail is critical to the counties. Vote-by-mail can increase voter turnout and save money. Although there can be some cultural resistance to vote-by-mail, people will accept it if they choose it through an election. If this bill does not pass, counties will have to hire poll workers, which can be difficult.**Testimony Against:** None.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State; Bob Terwilliger, Snohomish County Auditor; Evelyn Arnold, Chelan County Auditor; Mike Garvinson, Skamania County Auditor; and Al Brotche, Mason County Auditor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.